FROME URBAN DISTRICT COUNCIL.

Annual Report of the Medical Officer of Health

FOR THE YEAR 1905.

To the Members of the Frome Urban District Council.

GENTLEMEN,—We have had a remarkable year, both as to climatic conditions and general health. Last year the report was good; this year it is, I think, better. The birth-rate has increased and the death-rate diminished.

The weather has been very remarkable.

The rainfall was much below the average. Yet you will remark that we have had no prolonged drought, and we had a fair average of rain until September, since when it has been a minus quantity. We have had a really good season, free from extremes of temperature and enriched by an abundant harvest.

We have had more notifiable infectious disease than in 1904 23 cases as against 14. And in the early part of the year there was a prevalence of whooping cough, and in the last few months an epidemic of measles among the small ones—so widespread that I have had to recommend the closure for a time of two of the infant schools. Influenza has not been prevalent, nor was summer diarrhœa, although one death was reported. I append statistics of the rainfall in the months:—

Jan.	·93	April	2·33
Feb.	·63	May	·49
Mar.	4·97	June	2·83
July	·49	Aug.	4·24
Sept.	1·99	Oct.	1·98
Nov.	4·02	Dec.	1.29

Total, 1905, 26·17. 1903, 49·47. 1904, 30·40.

The zymotic death-rate is higher than last year, but very low, I think, compared with most towns of our size—this year two have been caused by diphtheria. The infantile death-rate continues to be low; and the number of births exceed by 42 those of last year.

The registered number of births was 255, as against 213 in 1904, 258 in 1903 and 245 in 1902—so we have more than reached the normal average. I am unable to account for the vast drop in 1904, except for the scarce and hare times—which will not, I hope, occur again.

The male births were 136, and the female 119, the male proportion being more nearly normal. There were 11 illegitimate births, 4 in the Union Workhouse and 7 outside. The general birth-rate has risen considerably, as I have before remarked. This year it is 22·27 per 1,000 inhabitants, last year it was 19·06, in 1904 22·07, and in 1903 23·14. The average for England and Wales is approximately 27.

We have had rather more epidemic cases than last year, but not a really large amount--23 cases in 23 houses, last year there were 14 in 13 houses. This is in a way satisfactory, as proving that in no case has disease been contracted by one person from another. I am glad to think that our people are more willing to take reasonable precautions. Your Sanitary Inspectors have aided me in a most prompt and efficient manner, and I feel greatly indebted to them. Two deaths have occurred from diphtheria, and four cases have been notified. This is a large proportion of fatality. Still, as always in Frome, this deadly disease is endemic, and not epidemic. Members of the same family, living under similar conditions, are attacked, but the disease is not contagious and does not affect others living near. The fullest precautions should always be taken, but there is not any cause for alarm.

The notifications were in detail:—Erysipelas, 3; scarlatina, 3; enteric fever, 3; diphtheria, 4. One case of scarlatina was removed to the Isolation Hospital and three cases of enteric fever—the latter during my absence and under exceptional circumstances. All the cases did well. In future I do not consider it advisable to send cases of enteric to the Isolation Hospital. These cases are not contagious and can be treated equally well at home, or if that be not possible, at other public institutions. These cases are always admitted to the general wards in the large London Hospitals, and lie side by side with other patients. If we are to admit them, I wish to press for a third ward as an extension to the Hospital, which has long been promised. 156 deaths were registered in 1905, exactly the same number as in 1902, which until now was our record year of health.

I append my usual tables of time, age and causation:—

(I.)

	1902.	*1903.*	*1904.*	*1905.*
Jan., Feb., Mar.	35	53	47	45
April, May, June	45	37	40	43
July, Aug., Sept.	33	34	32	25
Oct., Nov., Dec.	43	45	41	43
	156	169	160	156

(II.)

Under 1 year	15	31	15	20
1 to 5 years	12	13	5	8
5 to 15 years	4	5	6	4
15 to 25 years	8	7	6	2
25 to 65 years	47	37	46	42
Over 65 years	70	76	82	80
	156	169	160	156

(III.)

Zymotic diseases	8	16	2	3
Other Septic ,,	5	1	1	3
Tubercular ,,	10	13	18	6
Malignant ,,	13	11	16	11
Apoplexy	13	13	8	11
Diseases of nervous system	15	8	5	7
Circulatory system	20	23	19	16
Respiratory organs	10	15	22	25
Digestive organs	8	13	5	7
Excretory organs	4	2	9	10
Alcoholism and cirrhosis of liver	1	2	1	2
Premature birth	4	2	5	5
Age	35	39	41	39
Injuries	3	5	0	3
All other causes	7	5	8	8
	156	169	160	156

(IV.) Zymotic diseases.

Enteric fever	1	1	0	0
Measles	7	7	0	0
Scarlatina	0	0	0	0
Diarrhœa	0	2	2	1
Whooping cough	0	6	0	2
Diphtheria	0	0	0	2
	8	16	2	3

Thirty-six deaths were registered from the various public institutions in the town. Of these ten were non-residents. I have calculated the

death-rate on a population of 11,200 last year on 11,171, which represents our increase in numbers and proportionately enhances the value of the rate :—

	1902.	*1903.*	*1904.*	*1905.*
General death-rate per 1000 living ...	14·05	15·16	14·32	13·901
Ditto, allowing for non-residents ...	12 34	13·62	13·159	13·012
Zymotic death-rate	·72	1·43	·179	·267
Infantile death-rate per 1000 births ...	61·22	120·15	70·15	78.43

Our bill of health is therefore very good, and in advance of any recent year, and though the infantile death-rate is still too high, it is not in excess of the average. The town water supply remains unimpeachable in quantity and quality, and there has been a continuous improvement in our drainage system, and more house accommodation has been provided by the enterprise of builders. There are still many insanitary buildings in Frome. I think that owners are apt to forget that cottage property decays in the course of years, as human beings do, and in time must come to an end. Many closed windows have been made to open, and I sincerely hope that the inhabitants take advantage of this. I have recommended four houses to be closed for overcrowding.

1. I am glad to note a remarkable fall in the death-rate from tubercular disease. I think we shall have to pause before assuming that it is due to the more rational open-air treatment, but this is an undoubted improvement and a probable factor in reduction of disease.

2. The deaths from malignant disease have also decreased, but remain as in 1903, and I cannot hope that yet any specific antidote has been discovered, nor indeed do I think it likely that it will be. Strict cleanliness, the avoidance of any irritation of parts usually affected, are the best means of avoiding this fell disease; but only removal in the earliest stages of these growths in positions where removal is possible is likely to result in a permanent cure.

Among the deaths ten were from parishes outside the urban district, one in the Victoria Hospital and nine in the Union Workhouse Infirmary. No death has occurred in the Diocesan Home, and none in the Isolation Hospital. Four cases have been admitted to the latter institution — as I have stated above — and all did well. I wish to point out again that this Hospital is for the benefit of the public at large—to prevent the dissemination of contagious and infectious disease - and not primarily for the scientific treatment of individual cases, though when severe cases appear every care and attention must be rendered. I sincerely hope that the promised enlargement will be attended to in the current year.

I am afraid that the sewage system has not been so generally satisfactory this year, — at least I have had many complaints from private individuals. I do not think that people living in the area of the sewage stench have been unduly ill, but certainly this is occasionally an undoubted nuisance, and I am glad to know that steps are being taken to mitigate it. The filtration bed works admirably and its extension is most desirable, especially as since the completion of the Wallbridge works we have now to deal with a larger amount of effluent.

Yet all said and done the best remedy for any unpleasant conditions will be the insistence of the Council on all closets being provided with a water flush.

I have had 16 samples of water sent me for analysis, some good, some indifferent, but none as good as the town supply. This necessarily so, as open wells must suffer at times from surface drainage. I hope that before long all houses will use the town supply - this and the insistence that each house has a water flush to the closet is our most urgent sanitary need.

The bakehouses are generally clean and well kept. I have had correspondence with H.M. Inspector of Factories about one which has been underground for years. One bakehouse I have been unable to pass and it has since been closed.

In concluding my report, gentlemen, let me thank you for your courtesy and consideration. I regret to observe that by certain members promptitude and prescience in dealing with matters of sanitary importance have been considered a ground for attack on the sanitary staff, but I am sure it will not occur again. Neglect of duties may well be censured, but zeal in performing them should always be recognized and duly supported.

Your obedient Servant,

FREDERICK PARSONS,

Medical Officer of Health.

Feb. 23rd, 1906.

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REPORT

OF THE

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